

Master Plan Update

Town of Acton, Massachusetts

Executive Summary



Acton Planning Board
December 1998

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INTRODUCTION

Since the original Master Plan was completed in 1991, many of its recommendations have been adopted or implemented, including wide-ranging zoning changes affecting much of the Town. Also during this period, the conditions facing the Town have altered. With the booming regional economy of the late 1980s, townspeople were concerned about managing the impacts of rapid commercial growth. Soon after the Master Plan's completion, the region suffered a sharp recession, the recovery from which was led by residential, rather than commercial, construction. Based on these changed conditions, and the Town's progress in implementing the recommendations of the 1991 Master Plan, the time was right to revisit the Plan, update its data and analyses, and make warranted adjustments to policies and strategies.

The 1998 Master Plan Update is intended to be an update of the 1991 Plan. The 1998 Update preserves and refines the underlying themes of the 1991 Plan, including its two complementary objectives of promoting and enhancing village centers as growth areas and preserving open space. However, while retaining the essential direction of the 1991 Master Plan, the 1998 Update contains significant differences in its scope, structure, and detailed recommendations.

The Structure of the Master Plan Update

The Master Plan Update is designed to be consistent with the definition of master plans that is set forth in state law. It thus includes seven "elements," or chapters: Land Use, Housing, Economic

Development, Natural and Cultural Resources, Open Space and Recreation, Services and Facilities, and Transportation and Circulation. In addition there is a statement of Goals and Objectives and an Implementation chapter.

The boundaries between the functional elements of the Master Plan Update are not absolute, and many issues addressed in this document cross over between categories. This interdisciplinary aspect makes the Master Plan at once challenging and, if carefully considered, of immense importance to the management of the town.

The 1998 Master Plan Update also includes strategies and recommended actions that address a wider range of issues than the 1991 Master Plan, and refinements to the original strategies based on review of progress and community input.

Public Participation in the Planning Process

Public participation was invited at three stages of the Update process:

Identifying Issues and Formulating Goals

The outreach effort began in December 1997 with Town department heads discussing growth management-related problems, the decisions they expect the Town must make in the future, whether the 1991 Master Plan has been a helpful policy guide, and what the 1998 Master Plan Update might accomplish to help officials better meet their responsibilities.

In January 1998 the Planning Board convened two town-wide workshops,

which were attended by a total of approximately 100 townspeople. The workshops began with an overview of changes since 1991, a “report card” on accomplishments since the 1991 Master Plan, and policy questions that arise in light of Acton’s current situation.

There was clear overall support for the existing Master Plan’s strategies, and officials and townspeople agreed that the Master Plan is generally on the right track. However, they wanted to assess components to see why they have not worked as anticipated, and to examine adjustments and refinements. Townspeople and officials wanted the Master Plan Update to take a more proactive approach to economic development. Whereas the transportation component of the 1991 plan concentrated on vehicular traffic, workshop participants agreed that the Update should consider ways for townspeople to get around town without their cars. Diversity and a range of housing choices continue to be a priority, but participants wanted the Update to consider adjustments to achieve desired forms of housing and patterns of development. Finally, the workshops began deliberations about how Acton might pay for the rising costs of providing services and facilities that residents expect.

Mid-Project Review by Community Leaders

On June 30, 1998, the Planning Board held a workshop for community leaders to review the draft goals, objectives and strategies of the Update and to receive suggestions as to how the Master Plan could be most useful to the Town. The meeting was attended by 42 representatives of Town boards and departments, local and regional civic groups, and other area organizations.

Participants were asked to comment on the draft goals, objectives and strategies: which were on target; which might need adjustment; and what important issues might have been missed in the analysis. Finally, participants were asked to identify those goals, objectives or strategies of particular importance. The three priorities that emerged, with a fairly strong consensus, were:

- Slow residential growth
- Encourage economic development
- Protect the environment

Based in part on this meeting, many of the goals, objectives and strategies were adjusted to better reflect community concerns and priorities.

Responses to the Plan’s Recommendations

A final set of public workshops was held in October 1998 to present key findings and recommendations of the Draft Master Plan Update. The purposes of these workshops were:

- to review the Master Plan Update process;
- to summarize some key issues, findings and recommendations;
- to provide an opportunity for commenting on the key recommendations; and
- to begin to identify priorities for action.

It was stressed that the workshops would not look at continuing goals and strategies that enjoyed general support in the community, but rather at changes that might represent major shifts in policy or direction, in order to gauge the level of community agreement with such shifts. The presentation focused on six objectives:

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- Strengthen Acton's villages and existing business centers
 - Slow overall residential construction
 - Increase diversity of housing types and costs
 - Promote economic development
 - Expand the ways to get around town without a car
 - Provide a transportation system that is environmentally sound, safe and convenient

Participants in the workshops discussed a wide range of issues and topics, and no single issue or viewpoint dominated the discussions. However, several general themes emerged from the comments:

1. There is concern about the residential growth rate.
2. Members of the Economic Development Committee strongly urged actions to encourage business and tax base growth.
3. Regulations affecting businesses need to be simplified.
4. Traffic continues to be a major concern, and should be addressed in connection with any proposal for increasing the Town's development potential.
5. Residents are very interested in getting improved pedestrian and bicycle connections between their neighborhoods and both village and recreational areas.

Community Profile

Population trends are the basis for establishing reasonable projections of future demands on the Town. Town officials can interpret this information to provide for

efficient and timely provision of community services.

Acton experienced its greatest population growth between 1950 and 1970 when population quadrupled to 14,770. Most of this growth (78 percent) was due to in-migration. Zoning changes in the 1970s slowed Acton's growth. Since then, population growth has occurred primarily through natural increase. Recently, the number of births have increased.

Population trends are expected to continue. The town's population as of December 31, 1997 was 18,878. Acton's population will probably grow between 0.1 percent and 0.3 percent annually in the next few years. Therefore, Acton should not face significant capital expenditures for additions to municipal facilities and services to accommodate future growth (although investments may be needed to address recent growth or long-term maintenance).

The age of the population is an important determinant of the type of services a community must provide:

- From 1970 to 1990, Acton's median age increased significantly from 23.7 to 35.
- Children between 5 and 14 comprised 19 percent of the 1980 population, but decreased to 14 percent by 1990. The number of children under five has remained relatively stable as a percentage of total population since 1980.
- The elderly population (over 65) will increase from 1990 to 2010. Significant increases in the number of elderly persons will not occur until after 2010 when baby-boomers begin to reach 65.

These population trends mean Acton has to make careful utilization of its educational facilities a priority. Also, while providing

additional services or facilities for the elderly will not become a critical concern until 2010, providing services to keep the elderly in their homes is important to the overall social health of the community.

Households have been growing faster than population:

- From 1970 to 1980, population grew by 18.7 percent while dwelling units increased by 50.4 percent.
- From 1980 to 1990, population grew by 2% while the number of dwelling units increased by 9%.

Social changes such as single persons living alone and the increased divorce rate has increased the number of dwelling units. This housing demand appears to be continuing, although future housing units will not need to be as large.

Household composition has changed:

- Households are smaller with 3.52 persons per household in 1970, 2.78 in 1980, and 2.5 in 1990.
- The majority of households (52 percent) were married couple families.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of single-parent households which comprised 10.8% of all households in 1990 compared with 7.0% in 1980.

Income has increased significantly in Acton since 1979. Annual median income rose from \$27,323 in 1980 to \$69,384 in 1990. The median income ranks 23rd in the state but is comparable to surrounding communities.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Master Plan's goals and objectives address many aspects of Acton's activities, including land use and growth management policies, provision of municipal services and facilities, public safety, and environmental protection. The *goals* are overarching statements of the general directions the Town wishes to pursue. The *objectives* define the Town's position on individual issues, and can be

used to guide public and private decision making.

Subsequent elements of the Master Plan Update (Land Use through Transportation and Circulation) contain *strategies* and *actions* that support the goals and objectives. The *strategies* are general approaches to attaining the goals and objectives; while the *actions* are specific steps that the Town can take to achieve its objectives.

Land Use

Goal: Preserve those elements or features which contribute to Acton's New England town character as a suburban residential community with strong rural and historic roots.

Objectives:

- ◆ Strengthen Acton's traditional pattern of village centers.
- ◆ Maintain Acton's rural and historic elements.
- ◆ Provide incentives and aid to preserve and revitalize historic structures and places.
- ◆ Preserve natural and human-made features that contribute to Acton's character such as open fields, woodlands, ponds, country roads, and stone walls.
- ◆ Promote a sense of community.

Goal: Direct new residential development to protect Acton's natural environment and other resources, to be consistent with Acton's New England town character, and to encourage diversity in Acton's population.

Objectives:

- ◆ Encourage new residential development to preserve open space.
- ◆ Promote residential village environments that are consistent with Acton's character.
- ◆ Encourage a variety of neighborhood design alternatives for residential development.
- ◆ Promote pedestrian circulation within and between residential developments.
- ◆ Adjust the intensity of residential development to protect Acton's environmental resources and to remain within the limitations of its infrastructure.

Housing

Goal: Encourage diversity in Acton's population by achieving a mix of homes that enhances Acton's town character and provides needed choices for our residents.

Objectives:

- ◆ Preserve the character of Acton's established residential neighborhoods.
- ◆ Promote a range of economic diversity in housing including low and moderate income housing.
- ◆ Promote a range of choice in the types of homes to allow for residents' changing capacities and preferences.

Economic Development

Goal: Promote current and new commercial development within the context of the Master Plan by strengthening the tax base to reduce the tax burden on residential taxpayers.

Objectives:

- ◆ Support commercial and industrial growth that will fit in Acton and contribute to the community's quality of life and fiscal stability.
 - Encourage commercial and industrial development
 - Attract new businesses
 - Increase the diversity of commercial enterprise
- Increase Commercial, Industrial and Personal Property (C/I/P) revenues share to 20% within the next 5 years
- ◆ Support the concept of village and business districts by encouraging businesses of appropriate scale that will contribute to a mix of activities.

Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources

Goal: Protect and sustain Acton's natural environment and resources.

Objectives:

- ◆ Strictly enforce federal, state and local environmental laws, and supplement them with additional Town regulations if necessary.
- ◆ Ensure the restoration of polluted environmental resources.
- ◆ Protect the quality and quantity of Acton's water supply.
- ◆ Promote environmentally sound solid waste and wastewater management.
- ◆ Pursue regional solutions to environmental problems.
- ◆ Establish environmental standards for new development.

Goal: Preserve Acton's historic and cultural resources.

Objectives:

- ◆ Provide incentives and aid to preserve and revitalize historic structures and places.

Open Space and Recreation

Goal: Preserve the remaining elements of Acton's rural character.

Objectives:

- ◆ Protect and maintain Acton's remaining farmland, and promote active farming in the Town.
- ◆ Conserve open space parcels that have been identified as key remaining elements of Acton's rural character.
- ◆ Create greenbelts of conserved lands along waterways, to include key wildlife habitats.
- ◆ Manage and enhance resource opportunities at Acton's conservation lands.

Goal: Provide a variety of recreational opportunities for all Acton residents.

Objectives:

- ◆ Provide water recreational opportunities beyond existing facilities.
- ◆ Preserve open spaces which have value as aesthetic, recreational, wetland, water, and wildlife resources.
- ◆ Improve access to and between recreation and conservation areas.
- ◆ Develop, maintain, and encourage the use of Acton's recreational resources.
- ◆ Provide recreational opportunities for families with young children.
- ◆ Encourage entertainment opportunities for teenagers.

Services and Facilities

Goal: Provide high quality services, facilities, and administration within the fiscal capacity of the Town.

Objectives:

- ◆ Plan for new and expanded facilities as needed to serve the community.
- ◆ Construct new, and expand and renovate existing school facilities at the local and regional levels to meet the needs of increased school enrollment.
- ◆ Enhance the level of services that the Town can provide by continually seeking operational efficiencies and by using federal, state, and private funding sources to supplement Town funds.
- ◆ Consider alternative ways of generating local revenues to pay for services and amenities desired by residents.
- ◆ Explore and develop strategies to reduce reliance on the residential property tax to fund services and facilities, particularly for senior citizens and those on fixed incomes.

Goal: Provide a variety of high quality educational opportunities.

Objectives:

- ◆ Maintain the excellence of the public school system.
- ◆ Provide educational facilities and resources to support the increased student enrollment at the local and regional levels.
- ◆ Encourage day-care facilities.
- ◆ Provide a variety of continuing education programs.
- ◆ Sustain and promote Acton's excellent library services.
- ◆ Encourage the use of conservation areas and historic resources for educational purposes.
- ◆ Provide services and facilities to enable the elderly and persons with disabilities to live independently in Acton.
- ◆ Encourage greater access for all residents to cultural events, opportunities and services.

Goal: Continue to mitigate the impact of development upon natural resources

Objectives:

- ◆ Work with Acton Water Supply District to maintain adequate supply and quality of water and to address the state water withdrawal limit.
- ◆ Continue working to avoid and alleviate pollution resulting from failed septic systems.
- ◆ Continue planning and implementing a sewerage system as needed to protect water resources and service desired development

Transportation and Circulation

Goal: Provide a transportation system that meets the mobility and access needs of the community, is environmentally sound, safe and convenient, and reduces dependency on the automobile.

Objectives:

- ◆ Regulate the amount and intensity of new growth as one measure to control traffic.
- ◆ Establish transportation system capacity limits to be consistent with Acton's character and with the roadway's functional classification system.
- ◆ Minimize Town expenditures for road improvements by maximizing the use of federal and state funds, and private mitigation efforts.
- ◆ Promote local and regional public transportation.
- ◆ Provide facilities that will encourage walking and bicycling, including on-road bicycle access.
- ◆ Encourage regional and public/private cooperation in transportation planning.
- ◆ Provide adequate vehicle carrying capacity on the major traffic corridors to maintain mobility, safety and access to land and minor roads.
- ◆ Make improvements at hazardous locations while maintaining the scenic character of Acton's roads.
- ◆ Improve parking availability in the village centers consistent with

village plans and community design standards.

- ◆ Improve connectivity and circulation between and within

residential neighborhoods, and between and within business districts.

LAND USE

Existing Land Use Profile

Acton is a predominantly residential community: 78 percent of the parcels and 46 percent of the parcel area are in some form of residential use, while only 4 percent of the Town's parcels, comprising 7 percent of the total parcel area, are used for commercial or industrial purposes (these totals exclude vacant land). Single-family homes represent 63 percent of all residential dwellings, 88 percent of the developed residential land area, and 41 percent of the total parcel area in Acton.

On the nonresidential side, Acton has 554 acres of developed commercial land, 252 acres of developed industrial land, and 798 acres of agricultural land. Public and nonprofit uses total 2,971 acres (25 percent of the Town's land area), of which all but 418 acres are owned by the Town of Acton.

In addition to comprising the great majority of the land area of the Town, residential parcels have a somewhat higher average land value than commercial and, especially, industrial parcels. The average value per acre of developed residential land (excluding the three categories of "developable," "potentially developable" and "undevelopable" residential land) is approximately \$115,000, compared to \$113,000 per acre for developed commercial land and \$91,000 per acre for developed industrial land. However, when the value of improvements is added, the three land use types have similar values: residential parcels average about \$266,000 per acre in total valuation, commercial parcels average \$267,000 and industrial properties average \$262,000 per acre.

Buildout: Estimating How Much Acton Can Grow

Acton's estimated residential buildout is approximately 10,600 dwelling units, a net increase of about 3,400 units over the current housing stock. The Residence 2 zoning district accounts for the largest portion of this potential growth, with 2,157 dwellings (64% of the total potential development).

There are two important observations about Acton's future residential growth. First, although most residential growth in the next 10 to 15 years is likely to occur on land that is now vacant, the total supply of raw land available for residential development is limited: the Town has only 216 vacant parcels, with a total area of 1,231 acres, that can support residential growth under existing zoning. These parcels have a total development potential of approximately 1,100 dwelling units. By itself, this supply of open land would support 15 years of growth at an average rate of 72 new homes per year (the median for the 1980-1997 period).

The second point is related to the first: as open land disappears, most of the potential residential growth in Acton will come from infill development, whether through individual splits of smaller single-family lots or through creation of new subdivisions on land that is currently occupied by a single-family home but has significantly more land area than is required by the Zoning By-Law. This means that the actual ultimate buildout will probably be significantly lower than the maximum number computed: many homeowners will prefer to retain their larger lots rather than

split off a new house lot; and many other properties, while having the required minimum area for another dwelling, will be constrained from further development by other factors such as topography, access and the shape of the lot.

Based on these assumptions, Acton's "likely" residential buildout would be approximately 10,200 dwelling units, or about 400 units less than the estimated maximum buildout. At the long-term growth rate of 72 new units per year, this potential will accommodate approximately 40 years of continued residential growth in Acton. Assuming that the average household size remains the same as in 1990 (3.12 per unit for single-family homes, and 2.69 per unit for all housing types), this implies a total population of about 24,500 in the year 2020, and about 29,300 at buildout.

The nonresidential buildout is estimated at 8.38 million square feet (MSF) of floor area, an increase of 3.68 MSF (78%) above the current 4.70 MSF. More than half of this

potential growth is in four zoning districts: the Kelley's Corner district, the Office Park 1 district, the General Industrial district, and the Limited Business district.

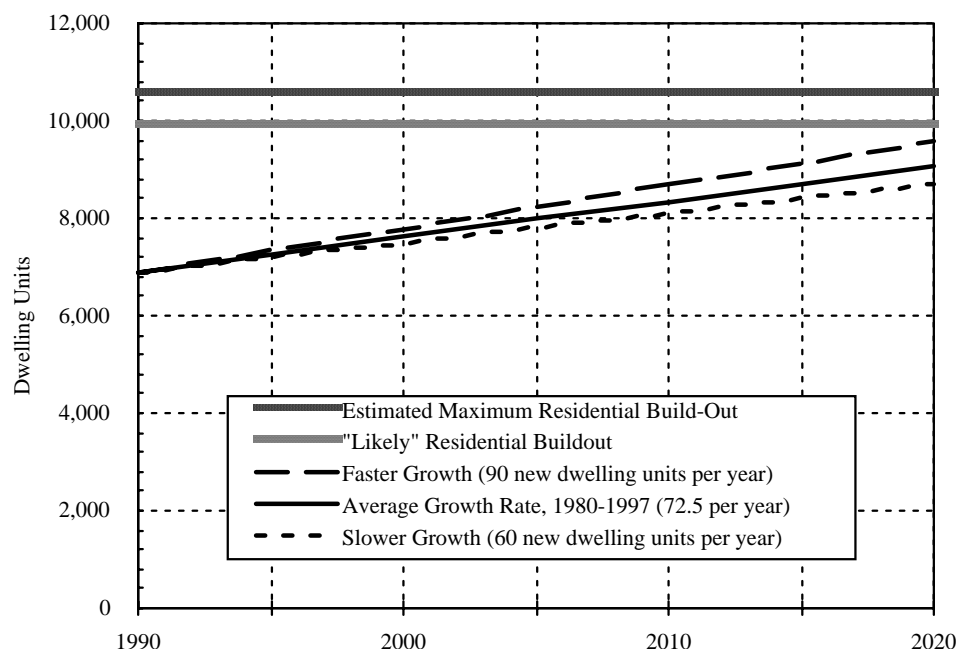
Open land represents about 31% of the estimated non-residential growth potential, allowing approximately 1.1 million square feet. The remaining 2.6 million square feet of nonresidential growth potential consists of more intensive use of existing commercial and industrial sites and conversion of existing residentially used parcels to nonresidential use in conformity with their zoning.

Land Use Issues, Strategies & Actions

Community Character

A balanced mixture of homes and businesses clustered in villages or hamlets and separated by open spaces helps define distinct areas within a community and more efficiently utilizes natural and town

Estimated Residential Buildout and Possible Growth Rates



resources. This pattern of development enables people to live, work and shop within a community setting, creating a sense of place. In such a setting, public and retail services are easily accessible. Compared to highway areas and extensive suburban commercial and industrial development, cars are fewer and travel at lower speeds, and pedestrian and other non-vehicular traffic can be safely accommodated at lower cost.

The rate of residential growth has become a prime concern for the Town recently. It has resulted in lost open space and increased demand for services. Throughout the Master Plan Update process, there was consensus among residents and Town officials that slowing the rate of residential growth, and if possible lowering the ultimate level of residential growth, should be a central focus of the Town's efforts, because of the potential implications for community character, traffic congestion, municipal finances, and the environment.

Strategies for Maintaining Community Character

Strategy LU1

Control and lower the rate of residential development in order to protect the character of the community and the Town's ability to provide needed facilities and services.

Strategy LU2

Encourage residential open space developments, clustering single family homes and preserving contiguous open space as an alternative to conventional single family home subdivisions; and monitor benefits gained.

Strategy LU3

Continue to seek average density zoning.

Strategy LU4

Continue to discourage further strip development along Route 2A/119 and to encourage village center developments.

Suggestions to moderate the rate of residential growth provided by residents and some Town officials include:

- rezoning all remaining vacant residential land to business or industrial uses;
- "downzoning" residential land;
- purchasing undeveloped residentially zoned land;
- limiting the building permits issued each year;
- adopting a moratorium on residential development; or
- removing the density bonus options for cluster development.

Each option would impact the total amount or rate of residential growth, but each also has disadvantages.



West Acton Village

Recommended Action to Manage Residential Growth

Action LU-1

Develop a program to control residential growth.

Village Centers

A key element of the Town's land use pattern is the presence of village centers. Based on this concept the Town adopted zoning provisions encouraging the focusing of residential and business activity so that intervening areas would be preserved or more lightly developed. Village plans were prepared for South and West Acton and a Specific Area Plan for Kelley's Corner was completed in two phases. Village centers have been proposed for the East Acton and North Acton areas and the basic zoning is in place, but formal studies and strategies have not been completed. Plans for sewer service are focused upon two of these areas.

During the community deliberations of the 1998 Master Plan Update townspeople voiced strong support for increasing the potential and vitality of Acton's villages, which residents regard as centers of town life. Strategies for encouraging the village pattern of development in all locations include continuing to encourage a mix of businesses and housing types, encouraging private sector involvement to improve the villages, and pursuing state and federal funding for rehabilitation efforts.

Strategies for Enhancing Villages and Community Centers

Strategy LU5

Continue to enhance the visual appearance of village centers.

Strategy LU6

Complete the series of plans for Acton's traditional and proposed villages. Strive to implement the plans, updating them as needed.

Strategy LU7

Continue to provide zoning bonuses and incentives for small business in the village districts and Kelley's Corner, to encourage revitalization and rehabilitation.

Strategy LU8

Enact a more flexible regulatory approach to business uses in the Village Districts to take better advantage of market opportunities.

Strategy LU9

Continue to encourage a mix of housing types in and near the villages—for example, apartments over stores, and higher density housing nearby.

Strategy LU10

Encourage private efforts to improve and beautify village centers.

Strategy LU11

Continue to monitor availability of state and federal aid for revitalizing and rehabilitating historic village centers.

Strategy LU12

Continue to encourage a mixture of residential and commercial uses in existing village centers and where new village-type development is appropriate.

Recommended Actions for Enhancing Villages and Community Centers

Action LU-2

Increase the maximum Floor Area Ratio for the East Acton Village and North Acton Village districts to 0.40.

Action LU-3

Complete the East Acton Village Plan. Take steps toward implementing it, giving special attention to actions identified as having high priority.

Action LU-4

Prepare a North Acton Village Plan. Take steps toward implementing it, giving special attention to actions identified as having high priority.

Action LU-5

Update the West Acton and South Acton Village Plans. Take steps toward implementing them, giving special attention to actions identified as having high priority.

Action LU-6

Revise the parking regulations for the EAV and NAV districts to reflect the provisions provided in the other village districts.

Action LU-7

Revise the zoning of the EAV and NAV districts to encourage small mixed use centers. Allow similar uses that are permitted in other village districts.

Action LU-8

Provide pedestrian scale lighting and benches in village centers.

Action LU-9

Create design guidelines to encourage the desired type of development in village centers.

Action LU-10

Apply for the Mass ReLeaf grant through the DEM Urban Forestry Program to purchase and plant trees in village centers.

Action LU-11

If the TDR option is removed (see discussion, below), multifamily dwellings should be allowed by special permit in the NAV and EAV districts.

Action LU-12

Continue taking steps to refine and implement the Kelley's Corner Specific Area Plan and Circulation Plan.

Zoning District Complexity and Specificity

The 1991 Master Plan created additional industrial and office park zoning districts designed to apply to specific situations. There are now five industrial districts, and

two Office Park districts. There is concern that the specificity of the existing zoning districts may represent “micromanagement” of land use and economic development and result in missed development opportunities.

It may be possible to provide more flexibility without compromising the balance between accommodating economic development and protecting community and environmental resources. The Master Plan Update also discusses several areas where consideration should be given to consolidating zoning districts or changing zoning district boundaries.

Also as a result of the 1991 Master Plan, the Town adopted some innovative planning tools such as transfer of development rights (TDR), traffic-based land use intensity regulations in the Limited Business district, and town-wide trip generation limitations for nonresidential development. These approaches were of limited usefulness and are re-evaluated in the Update.

There are questions about the extent to which the zoning regulations can or should be simplified to ease the regulatory burdens on applicants and Town departments. For example, many uses are currently regulated through the special permit process. It may be possible to allow some of these uses “by right”, or to convert site plan review from a special permit process to an administrative process. On the other hand, there may be a case for wider application of the special permit process, for example, to provide more flexibility in dimensional standards.

Strategies for Reducing Zoning District and Regulation Complexity

Strategy LU13

Provide more flexibility in the Town's zoning districts and use regulations without compromising the balance between accommodating economic development while protecting community and environmental resources.

Strategy LU14

Strive to create a simple, clear, and direct regulatory approach.

Strategy LU15

Enact a more flexible regulatory approach to business uses allowed in the village districts and Kelley's Corner, to encourage revitalization and rehabilitation.

Strategy LU16

Simplify the Town's zoning regulations where possible, in order to encourage desired types of development, facilitate administration by Town staff, and minimize unnecessary burdens on applicants.

Recommended Actions for Reducing Zoning District and Regulation Complexity

Action LU-13

Remove from the Zoning Bylaw the Transfer of Development Rights provisions and associated parking limitations (Section 5.4).

Action LU-14

Reduce the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in the Limited Business district from 0.20 to 0.15.

Action LU-15

Consider combining the LI and LI-1 districts.

Action LU-16

Consider rezoning the SM district along north Main Street to the GI district, provided that groundwater protection will not be diminished.

Action LU-17

Consider rezoning the SM district at Wetherbee Street and Keefe Road to the EAV district.

Action LU-18

Move forward with proposal to raise the floor area ratio for the OP-2 district, in order to encourage office park development of the Auto Auction site and adjacent areas.

Action LU-19

Consider consolidating the OP-1 and OP-2 districts if more intensive development in the OP-2 district is disapproved by Town Meeting.

Action LU-20

Revise the use table to address specific concerns:

- *Separate hotels and motels from inns. Allow Inns and B&B's in the village districts as of right and allow B&B's in residential districts by special permit. Hotels and motels should be allowed in the business districts by right and perhaps industrial districts, by special permit.*
- *Revise the definitions for studio, recreation, and retail.*
- *Create new definitions for theaters and department stores.*

Action LU-21

Update the use table and definitions to provide more flexibility as the character and type of uses change over time.

Action LU-22

Remove from the Zoning Bylaw the Site Plan Special Permit process and replace it with a simplified Site Plan Review procedure.

Action LU-23

Review uses to determine whether any uses currently requiring a special permit should be allowed by right instead.

Action LU-24

Review the Town's prohibition of restaurant drive-up windows and consider how they might be allowed.

Action LU-25

Consider expanding the Nagog Park OP-1 district to include a portion of the land adjacent to the Westford town line, but preserving a dense buffer area to protect the adjacent residentially-zoned property and define a limit to expansion of the district.

Action LU-26

Consolidate zoning district boundaries in the area of Route 62 and High Street.

Action LU-27

Create an index for the Zoning Bylaw in order to allow the document to be more user-friendly.

Action LU-28

Allow for variations from the maximum or minimum dimensions (frontage, width, depth, height, etc.) by special permit rather than by variance.

Action LU-29

Consider creating landscape and site design standards that are flexible enough to meet the needs of a specific site but are still consistent with the Town's goals.

Powder Mill Area



HOUSING

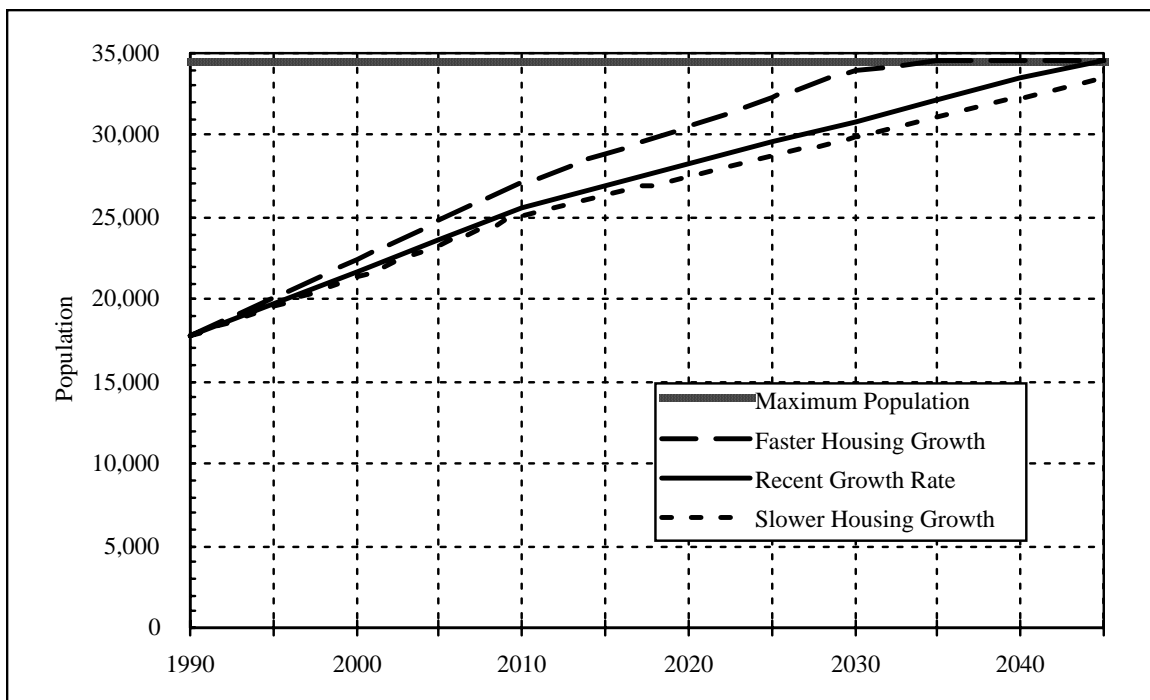
During the 1990s Acton has been growing at a rate of approximately 92 dwelling units per year, and about 169 new residents per year. The recent growth rate is higher than in the 1980s but is not approaching the high rates of previous decades. It is projected that Acton will have between 8,700 and 9,600 dwelling units by the year 2020, and a population of about 24,500 and 29,600.

The age of the population is an important determinant of the type of services a community must provide. From 1970 to 1990, Acton's median age increased significantly from 23.7 to 35 while the percentage of children between 5 and 14 decreased from 19 percent in 1980 to 14 percent by 1990. The number of children

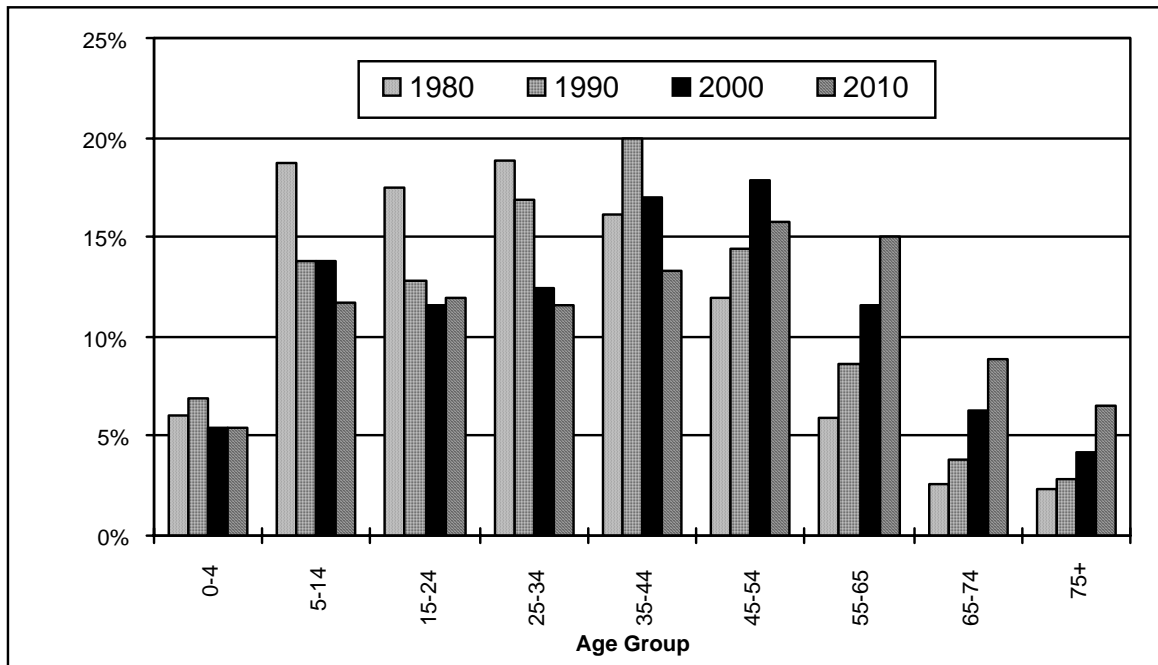
under five has remained relatively stable as a percentage of total population since 1980. The elderly population (over 65) will increase from 1990 to 2010. Significant increases in the number of elderly persons will not occur until after 2010 when baby-boomers begin to reach 65.

Overall observed population trends mean Acton has to continue to make careful utilization of its educational facilities a priority. Also, while providing additional services or facilities for the elderly will not become a critical concern until 2010, providing services to keep the elderly in their homes is important to the overall social health of the community.

Acton's Buildout Population



Acton Age Distribution, 1980-2010



Judged on such indicators as household income and housing values, Acton is one of the most affluent towns in Massachusetts. The Town's 1990 median household income ranked 23rd among the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns, and its 1996 average valuation for single-family residences ranked 35th out of 338 communities for which data were available. In Fiscal Year 1997 the average was \$238,990. Most single-family homes in Acton are valued between \$200,000 and \$250,000.

Despite strong regulatory actions taken as a result of the 1991 Master Plan, Acton has not been able to expand its percentage of affordable housing. The Town's 144 subsidized housing units represent 2.1 percent of Acton's 1990 year-round housing units, a lower percentage than most surrounding towns as well as most communities in the I-495 and Route 2 corridors. The average for the state is 8.53%.

Housing Issues, Strategies & Actions

Neighborhood Character

As Acton approaches residential buildout, housing developments will consume much of the Town's remaining open land, reducing the "breathing space" that currently contributes to Acton's semi-rural character. Moreover, as the land value in the inner suburbs rises, Acton's older residential neighborhoods may experience more intensive redevelopment, with larger homes replacing more modest structures. These two trends have the potential to change the character of Acton's neighborhoods, in both physical scale and socioeconomic diversity.

Strategy H1

Monitor strategies that other communities are implementing to address the issue of "tear-downs" and "mansionization" in healthy neighborhoods

Affordable Housing

The lack of affordable housing and services for seniors who remain in their homes can have an eventual impact on the demand for Town services and additional affordable housing options:

- The continued residence of a household whose children have grown and moved on helps delay an added demand for such town services as schools and certain recreation facilities if the house were sold to a young family.
- Personnel from the Fire and Police Departments and the Council on Aging are currently putting time and resources into meeting emergencies because there is no department available to help at-risk seniors before emergencies arise. Older residents may have to consider moving from their home because of difficulties with maintenance, shoveling snow, transportation and similar demands.

At the long term local growth rate, buildout will be reached in approximately 45 years, and Acton will need 1,060 guaranteed affordable units to meet the Massachusetts mandate for 10% affordability. This is 916 more units than the current 144, almost a six-fold increase. The community's affordable housing effort needs:

1. Community-wide understanding of what affordability contributes to Acton's quality of life;
2. More effective strategies for gaining affordable units;
3. More funding to gain additional affordable homes and to maintain and rehabilitate existing affordable homes.

Strategies for Promoting Affordable Housing

Strategy H2

Seek opportunities to acquire buildable Town-owned properties that might be suitable for donations towards the development of affordable housing.

Strategy H3

Require some percentage of units accessible to persons with disabilities in affordable housing developments.

Strategy H4

Direct the focus of affordable housing initiatives to provide housing for the elderly, young families, and low and moderate income residents in our community.

Strategy H5

Continue to seek federal and state moneys for housing rehabilitation for lower income home owners and tenants.

Strategy H6

Examine how the Town's current efforts and strategies might be refined, and how additional ways might be adopted, to be more effective in achieving a diversity of housing types with a range of affordability, including but not limited to:

- *investigating the feasibility of a tax abatement program for owner-occupants who rent to eligible low and moderate income elderly;*
- *encouraging more affordable housing in, or in connection with, new residential developments through duplexes, through lot coverage limitations, by allowing smaller lots in the context of average density zoning, and by encouraging off-site affordable units;*

- *revising the condo conversion law to give the option for limited equity cooperatives and to establish linkage requirements (e.g., units to housing authority, construction of comparable rental housing stock, cash payments to housing trust fund);*
- *developing deed restricted moderate income home ownership opportunities;*
- *establishing a community land trust and/or housing trust fund to provide housing that is not subject to the speculative market forces;*
- *investigating the impact of tax rates on housing affordability in Acton and incorporating this issue in programs to provide affordable housing;*
- *evaluating the potential for – and fiscal implications of – increased incentives for more affordable housing for seniors and for families.*

Recommended Actions for Promoting Affordable Housing

Action H-1

Investigate costs and benefits of establishing a Town Social Services Department.

Action H-2

Update the 1989 Affordable Housing Study. Include in the study broad-based community discussion of how maintaining affordability will contribute to Acton's quality of life. Concentrate on identifying and adopting satisfactory and effective strategies for gaining affordable homes from both the development of open land and infill within existing neighborhoods.

Action H-3

Consider increasing the permitted FAR in village districts for mixed use developments that include guaranteed affordable units.

Action H-4

Simplify the formulas and processes in the Affordable Housing Overlay District so that density bonuses can be easily determined and attained, and provide options for satisfying the affordable housing requirements with off-site housing units.

Action H-5

Consider adopting a zoning provision that requires the inclusion of affordable units in new developments.

Action H-6

Create a set-aside fund for rehabilitation of current Housing Authority units, and low interest home improvement loans for seniors and other populations of concern.

Action H-7

Search out parcels with problematic titles that the Town could clear through eminent domain and turn over to ACHC for use in developing affordable homes. Explore with owners who can be identified the potential options for satisfactory resolution.

Action H-8

Examine the costs and benefits of a Real Estate Transfer Tax, and consider how such a tool might assist Acton in achieving objectives relating to both affordable housing and conservation of natural resource areas.



*Action H-9
Remove the Affordable Housing Overlay
District from areas zoned industrial or
business. Develop alternative mechanisms*

*to offset any resulting loss of affordable
housing potential.*

Sachem Way Affordable Housing Development

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1998 townspeople feel that progress has been made in safeguarding natural and cultural resources, and that business can play a positive role in community life. The 1998 Master Plan Update reflects a shift to a proactive stance regarding business development so as to take advantage of benefits that can be gained from business activity, while still protecting natural resources and mitigating adverse impacts. This approach will require continued collaborative teamwork between the Town and the business community.

The tax burden has relied more and more heavily on residential property owners which is evidenced in Acton's economic experience during the 1990s. The percent of commercial and industrial tax levy in Acton dropped from 22% to 13%, one of the largest drops of all of the towns and cities along the I-495 technology corridor. In addition, while the total number of land parcels in Acton increased by 6%, the number of parcels zoned for commercial and industrial use decreased by 15%, the second largest decrease of all the communities along the I-495 technology corridor.

Acton's property tax base is predominantly residential: in FY 1998, 85.1% of the Town's total valuation was classified as residential. Residential properties comprised about 77% of total valuation in Fiscal Years 1990 through 1992, rising to about 80% in Fiscal 1994, 82% in FY 1995, and 84% in FY 1996. This pattern of residential valuations representing a growing share of total valuation has been common in most Massachusetts communities, because both residential values and residential construction rebounded from the 1990 recession more quickly than did commercial values and construction. Nevertheless,

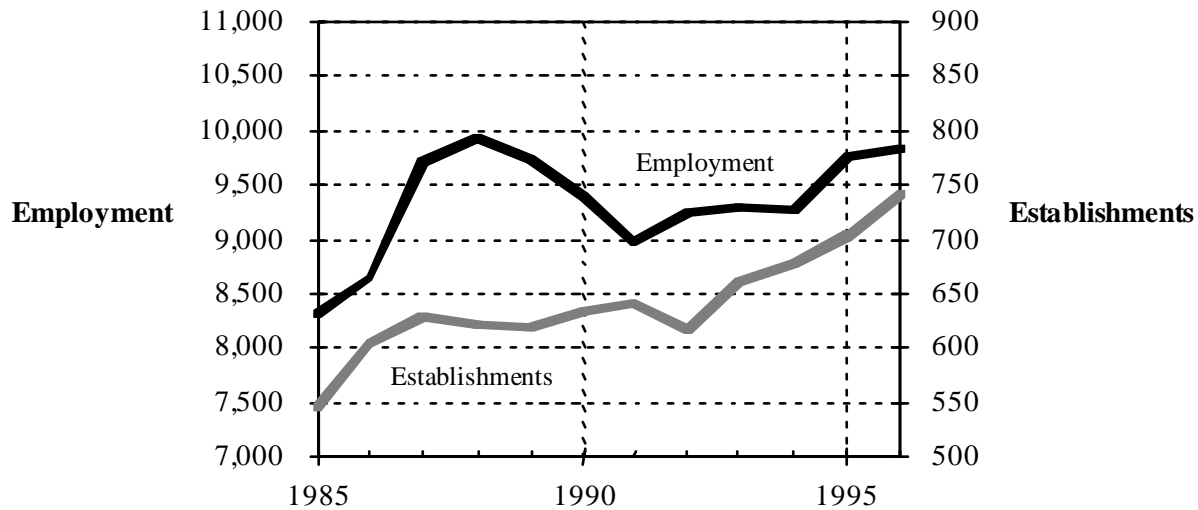
Acton's commercial/industrial tax base remains relatively high in comparison to surrounding towns.

Acton's residential tax rate is the 5th highest of the I-495 technology corridor communities. This can be attributed to two factors. First, the Town's average residential value is lower than in some of Acton's surrounding towns such as Concord, Carlisle and Sudbury, so that the tax rate necessary to support a similar expenditure level is higher. Second, several communities have split tax rates so they are able to assess non-residential property more heavily than residential.

The combination of the high tax rate and relatively low average assessed value results in a relatively moderate single family tax bill for Acton residents when compared to surrounding communities. However, Acton's average single-family tax bill is high relative to all communities in the state, ranking 15th in FY 1998.

The Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training (DET) presents profiles of employment in Acton and the surrounding area. The period from 1985 through 1996 (the latest year for which comprehensive data are available) encompassed the end of the economic boom of the 1980s, a significant recession in the early 1990s, and a resurgence in the economy in the mid 1990s. Over the course of this 11-year period, Acton experienced an increase in annual payroll, average annual wage and number of establishments. During the recession, Acton's total employment decreased, but the number of establishments remained stable. Subsequent economic growth has nearly erased the job losses of the 1989-91 recession.

Change in Employment & Number of Establishments, 1985-1996



For comparison purposes, an “Acton region” has been defined to include Acton and thirteen surrounding towns extending along both sides of the Route 2 corridor from Route 128 to Interstate 495 (Bedford, Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Harvard, Hudson, Lincoln, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, Sudbury and Westford). Over the past decade Acton’s experience has in large part reflected regional trends, but there are also significant differences in specific sectors:

- Overall, Acton gained jobs while the surrounding towns lost employment. Moreover, both total payrolls and average wages increased more rapidly in Acton than in the region generally. However, the number of businesses in Acton grew more slowly than in the region as a whole.
- Acton’s job growth sectors included Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE); Services; and Government. In all three sectors Acton did better than its region: the surrounding towns lost employment in the FIRE sector, and gained Services and Government jobs more slowly than Acton.
- In contrast, Acton’s 1985-95 employment growth in the Transportation, Communication and Utilities sector was only 2%, compared to 69% growth in the region.
- Employment in Wholesale and Retail Trade increased during this period, but more slowly than in the surrounding towns.
- With very little employment in the Agricultural, Forestry and Fishing sector to begin with, Acton lost jobs in this sector while the surrounding region picked up a modest number of jobs.
- Employment in the Construction sector declined in the region, and Acton particularly: Acton’s job loss in this sector represents two-thirds of the total regional reduction in employment.
- Employment in the Manufacturing sector declined in Acton over the ten-year period, but the rate of job loss was less in Acton than in the region

generally (23% in Acton, compared to 42% in the region).

Economic Development Issues, Strategies & Actions

Promoting Appropriate Business Development

The Board of Selectmen created a 10 point set of business-friendly goals to establish a more favorable receptivity of commercial and industrial enterprise, and appointed an Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDC) to advise the Selectmen on matters pertaining to Acton's ability to improve its economic well-being. As a catalyst to its direction, the EDC contracted with the Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts to study and evaluate the Town's demographics, meet with and advise the EDC and create a suggested Economic Development Plan for Acton.

Strategies for Promoting Appropriate Business Development

Strategy ED 1

Actively promote and support commercial and industrial development

Strategy ED 2

Encourage the continued growth and development of entrepreneurial high technology companies

Strategy ED 3

Amend Zoning Bylaw

Strategy ED 4

Rezone to increase commercial and industrial development potential

Strategy ED 5

Incentives for additional development

Strategy ED 6

Infrastructure Improvements

Strategy ED 7

Improve Permit Process

Strategy ED 8

Develop a Marketing Plan

Strategy ED 9

Database of businesses and available commercial and industrial land

Strategy ED 10

Develop a Taxation Strategy

Recommended Actions for Promoting Appropriate Business Development

Action ED 1

Encourage commercial development to create a sustainable balance of land uses.

Action ED 2

Give special attention to development of the few remaining commercial/ industrial sites.

Action ED 3

Increase types of land uses allowed.

Action ED 4

Consider elimination of the "high traffic generators" cap in the Zoning Bylaw within the context of the Traffic & Circulation element of the 1998 Master Plan Update.

Action ED 5

Develop implementation plan with incentives that may include:

- *Provision of FAR density bonus in Village and Business Districts for business that began as home based business*
- *Identification of Village and Business Districts as prime locations for incubator (start-up) businesses*
- *Encouragement of home based business*
- *Encouragement of incubator (start-up) businesses.*

Action ED 6

Re-write sign bylaw to be less confusing.

Action ED 7

Increase FAR where appropriate.

Action ED 8

Evaluate whether the minimum open space requirement for non-residential zoning districts should be reduced from 50% to 35%.

Action ED 9

Combine the Light Industrial & Light Industrial 1 districts and increase FAR.

Action ED 10

Reduce the minimum lot requirement for the OP-1, OP-2, LI, LI-1 and IP districts.

Action ED 11

Remove the complexity relating to computation of allowed development density in the LB District based on number of parking spaces.

Action ED 12

Revise selected parking requirements.

Action ED 13

Rezone some residential land, in locations well served by infrastructure, to business, commercial and industrial districts.

Action ED 14

Remove Affordable Housing Overlay District from all commercial and industrial zoning districts while working to increase affordable housing options for residential zoned land.

Action ED 15

Prevent conversion/loss of commercial and industrial land to residential development.

Action ED 16

Consider restructuring the TDR provisions within the Zoning Bylaw to provide sufficient incentives for new development and redevelopment of selected areas.

Action ED 17

Establish clear design standards for all commercial and industrial districts.

Action ED 18

Aggressively pursue state and federal funding of important infrastructure improvements.

Action ED 19

Construct public sewers.

Action ED 20

Encourage traffic management, transportation improvements and enhancements (e.g. Route 2 overpass).

Action ED 21

Continue to advance the work of the Route 2 Corridor Advisory Committee.

Action ED 22

Continue to advance the work of the Route 2 Corridor Advisory Committee.

Action ED 23

Work to increase the water withdrawal cap.

Action ED 24

Work to ensure consistent utility service throughout Acton.

Action ED 25

Upgrade telecommunication capabilities.

Action ED 26

Simplify Rules & Regulations for all Special Permit/Site Plan processes.

Action ED 27

Amend Zoning Bylaw to simplify procedures.

Action ED 28

Re-write the Development Guide to be more informative and include charts to clarify permitting processes.

Action ED 29

Establish an Ambassador Program within Acton to meet with prospective businesses.

Action ED 30

Evaluate the following:

- *Appointment of an Ombudsmen*

- *Hire of new town staff: Economic Development Director/official*
- *Establishment of Commercial & Industrial Development Commission or other such entity.*

Action ED 31

Develop and implement educational programs to inform voters of relationship between commercial and industrial property, quality of life and their tax burden.

Action ED 32

Consider using a newsletter and/or web site for economic development

Action ED 33

Maintain current and accurate inventory of businesses (update at least annually).

Action ED 34

Complete database of available vacant, under-utilized commercial and industrial properties and developable land, include features (e.g. rail spur, loading docks).

Action ED 35

Analyze and react to database.

Action ED 36

Require fiscal analysis of all proposed development.

Action ED 37

Explore in concert with other mechanisms incentives for additional development such as tax abatements, Tax Increment Financing, special assessments, low-interest loans, employee training.

Strengthening Acton's Villages and Community Business Area

The community wishes to continue the 1991 Master Plan's emphasis on small scale mixed uses in the villages. In addition, Kelley's Corner has been identified as the most appropriate area in Acton to locate

businesses and retail stores with regional attraction.

Strategies to Strengthen Villages and Community Business Areas

Strategy ED 11

Establish new business districts

Strategy ED 12

Update Village and Business District Plans

Strategy ED 13

Diversify commercial enterprise

Recommended Actions to Strengthen Villages and Community Business Areas

Action ED 38

Establish a new zoning district for the business, commercial and industrial properties located on Powder Mill Road, High Street, Sudbury Street and Knox Trail.

Action ED 39

Establish new village business districts in North Acton and East Acton.

Action ED 40

Revise Zoning Bylaw to:

- *Allow additional land uses to provide a good mixture of uses*
- *Increase the FAR in the Village Districts*
- *Allow transfer of development rights within village districts*
- *Establish design guidelines*
- *Establish parking requirements to encourage connectivity (e.g. consolidation and sharing of parking lots, interconnected parking lots behind existing commercial development, reduce curb cuts.*

Action ED 41

Create Plans for North Acton Village Business District and East Acton Village Business District.

Action ED 42

Evaluate further implementation of the Kelley's Corner Plan.

Action ED 43

Update the West Acton Village Plan and South Acton Village Plan.

Action ED 44

Increase the diversity of goods and services available to residents by encouraging diversity of commercial enterprise.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Open space, recreation and conservation needs were key issues addressed in past planning studies. Residents have identified a need to protect wetlands and water resources, through creation of greenbelts and/or purchase of additional open space. The need to preserve open space was also identified as an important means of maintaining Acton's rural character.

Acton's historic roots as a farming community can be seen in the few remaining farms in town. Acton contains a relatively small amount of prime farmland, mostly in South Acton. Much of Acton's most suitable farmland is no longer utilized for agricultural purposes and has been used for development purposes or allowed to reforest.

Acton is located in the Merrimac drainage system and Concord River Basin and has five watershed areas. Major bodies of open water include Nagog Pond, Grassy Pond, Ice House Pond and a short segment of the Assabet River. Wetlands comprise approximately 15% of Acton's land area, are primarily associated with the major stream systems, and tend to be concentrated in the southwest portion of town.

Soils are predominately moist and stony with many high water tables. Wet soils are found predominantly in the southern portion of town and along the stream valleys. Most soils in Acton are poorly suited for on-site sewage disposal. Corrective measures needed to assure their environmental safety are costly and the threat of future failure is high. The lack of a public wastewater collection and treatment facility and the resulting pollution from on-site septic systems is one of the most serious environmental problems facing Acton.

Natural and Cultural Resource Issues, Strategies & Actions

Wastewater Treatment

While the Town has experienced few problems with its seven existing package treatment plants, the number of failed septic systems in some areas is substantial. Town meeting has approved a \$17 million sewer project, now being designed. The Town should continue planning for a further expansion of the public sewer system, especially for areas where septic systems are failing or aging and where on-site replacement is not possible.

The Board of Health is evaluating improved standards for sewage treatment and should establish high standards where environmentally necessary and fiscally feasible. Tertiary treatment is one such option and is one of the most advanced methods of treating sewage and is now more affordable even at lower discharge rates.

Strategies to Improve Wastewater Treatment

Strategy NC1

Continue to require treatment plants for major new developments, and seek installation of extra capacities to service existing and future needs.

Strategy NC2

Construct adequate sewage treatment facilities for areas where septic systems are aging or failing, particularly where on-site replacement is not possible.

Strategy NC3

Conduct planning for and management of the public sewer system in the context of town-wide land use planning.

Strategy NC4

Establish tertiary sewage treatment or equivalent as the standard in Acton where environmentally necessary and fiscally feasible.

Recommended Actions to Improve Wastewater Treatment

Action NC-1

Implement the sewer project currently being designed in South Acton

Solid Waste

Annual household hazardous waste collection dates in Acton have increased from one to two, and households served from 120 to 400. The need now is to explore regional programs. Consequently, the Town is conferring with the Town of Lexington, which is attempting to build a permanent disposal facility for household hazardous waste.

Landfill closures and the increasing costs of solid waste disposal through conventional means such as incineration have made recycling a more viable and necessary element of communities' solid waste management strategies. However, Acton faces a dilemma with respect to recycling because the Town is required by contract to provide a certain annual tonnage of solid waste to NESWC for disposal. Increasing recycling efforts, while better for the environment, will detract from the Town's ability to meet its contractual obligations, with potential negative fiscal impacts. Resolving this dilemma will be an ongoing issue.

Strategy NC5

Continue and improve hazardous waste collection efforts and public education regarding the use and disposal of hazardous materials.

Strategy NC6

Continue to pursue a regional effort to establish a permanent disposal facility for household hazardous waste.

Strategy NC7

Continue to pursue coalitions with other towns to effect statewide and/or regional waste reduction.

Strategy NC8

Continue to promote and support efforts for trash separation in the households, for recycling and composting.

Strategy NC9

Continue to work on the problem of trash and litter in the villages, along the roads and in public places as a component of the watershed protection program.

Strategy NC10

Continue to monitor options for zoning techniques and other regulations and standards to promote waste reduction.

Environmental Protection

Acton has made progress in enacting and strengthening regulations for the protection of natural resources. However, Acton must continue to *enforce* environmental regulations and zoning bylaws. Participation in regional protection efforts, ensuring sufficient staff for enforcement of regulations and promoting public education are strategies that can enhance environmental protection efforts.

Strategy NC11

Maintain staff sufficient for environmental enforcement and inspections.

Strategy NC12

Continue to participate in regional environmental protection programs.

Strategy NC13

Continue to pursue the Watershed Trading Program

Strategy NC14

Continue to coordinate volunteer efforts and Town resources and equipment on Town beautification projects.

Strategy NC15

Continue educational programs for Town boards and staff on environmental issues.

Strategy NC16

Continue environmental education and outreach programs serving the general public.

Municipal Water Supply

Acton relies on wells, and thus the underlying aquifer system, for its entire water supply. Over the long range, a change in public water usage patterns could have a substantial positive impact on the Town's water delivery system. Acton has a relatively low per capita water use, but water consumption doubles in summer months, principally due to the watering of lawns. An extensive education program is needed regarding conservative outdoor watering. A shift from lawns and other high water-demanding plants toward landscaping demanding less water would improve water conservation.

Strategies to Ensure the Municipal Water Supply

Strategy NC17

Mitigate potential danger to Acton's ground water posed by nitrate contamination by implementing a sanitary sewer collection system.

Strategy NC18

Pursue regional ground water protection to protect Acton's aquifers in adjacent towns.

Strategy NC19

Continue to improve and expand water conservation efforts to include an on-going education program that raises public awareness regarding alternatives to high water-demanding lawns and plants in home gardens.

Strategy NC20

Continue to monitor options for zoning techniques and other regulations and standards to promote ground water protection.

Strategy NC21

Reduce application of road salt and, in particular, seek the state's cooperation in this effort.

Recommended Action to Ensure the Municipal Water Supply

Action NC-2

Review zoning in adjacent towns to determine if they support protection of Acton's groundwater resources. Work with communities to take action to revise regulations as necessary

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

In light of growth pressure for residential, commercial and industrial development in Acton, the 1991 Plan set the objective of directing development away from environmentally sensitive areas. Zoning changes and the local wetlands bylaw were subsequently adopted. The State's Rivers Protection Act also pursues this objective. As the amount and density of development increases, it is important that development controls, during and after construction, be in place and enforced, to ensure that the present level of surface water quality is maintained.

Strategy NC22

Continue to inventory and prioritize endangered species and critical habitat for protection. Take action for protection as needed.

Strategy NC23

Continue to create and set aside wildlife corridors linking wetlands, conservation areas and remaining open land.

Strategy NC24

Continue to monitor options for zoning techniques and other regulations and standards to promote wetlands and wildlife habitat protection.

Strategy NC25

Continue to clean up Fort Pond Brook and other surface water bodies as needed, to maintain or improve their natural and recreational values.

Strategy NC26

Continue to monitor options for zoning techniques and other regulations and standards to promote watershed management.

Historic Preservation

The Town has established local historic districts in South Acton, West Acton and Acton Center. Acton should provide incentives for historic preservation to encourage land owners to preserve, protect and enhance the integrity of historic areas. It should be noted that the Town has already implemented a number of tools for historic preservation such as local historic districts, demolition delay, and village district zoning. These provisions should be

Ice House Pond

maintained to further historic preservation and enhancement efforts.

Strategies for Historic Preservation

Strategy NC27

Explore zoning bonuses for historic preservation.

Strategy NC28

Explore tax incentives for historic preservation.

Strategy NC29

Encourage public/private partnerships for preservation.

Recommended Actions for Historic Preservation

Action NC-3

Fully complete the Acton cultural resources inventory.

Action NC-4

Focus on protecting the following parcels which have particular historic importance:

- *Preserve and enhance historic mill sites within Acton villages.*
- *Preserve the structural integrity of the Faulkner Mill Dam (Erikson Dam).*

- *Review the area surrounding the Isaac Davis Trail to ensure views and vistas remain intact.*

Action NC-5

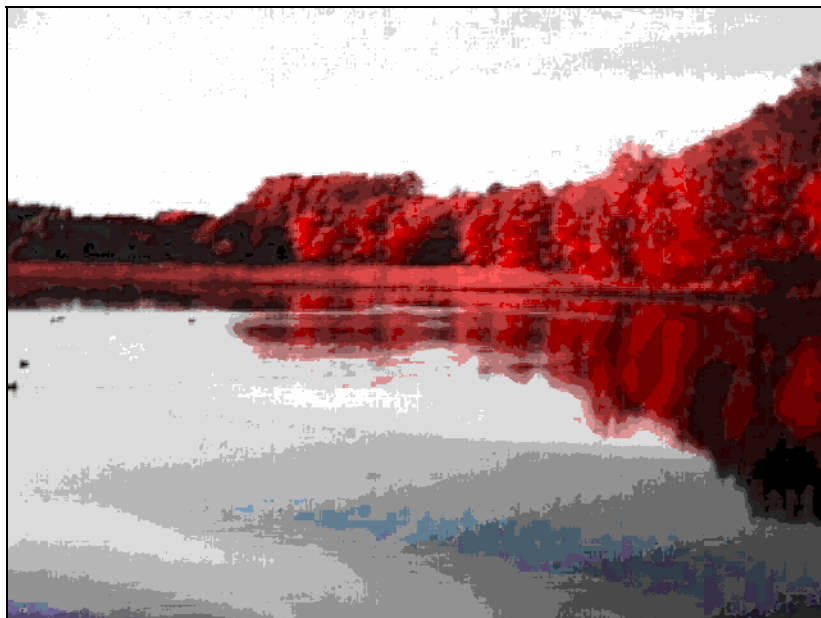
Determine whether certain areas should be nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and/or are suitable for Preservation Restrictions.

Action NC-6

If NHRP designation is obtained, encourage the use of the Investment Tax Credit for private investment and rehabilitation of historic properties.

Action NC-7

Encourage Preservation Restrictions on properties of significant historical value either by encouraging property owners to donate the development rights or by acquisition by the Town, the Acton Historical Society, Ironwork Farm, Inc., or some other historical organization.



OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

The Town's *Open Space and Recreation Plan* was completed in 1996. The Plan evaluates and prioritizes Acton's future open space needs, and plans for protecting the town's natural resources, developing the town's recreational potential, and preserving Acton's remaining rural character. The Plan summarizes the Town's program for acquiring and managing open space and many actions concerning organizational and policy changes have been implemented.

Protected Open Space

There are 1,522 acres of Town-owned Conservation and Town Forest Land in Acton. Conservation lands are well protected. The state authorized the purchase of conservation lands to conserve vanishing natural resources. Transfer is intentionally difficult and requires a majority vote of the conservation commission, a two-thirds vote of the city council or town meeting, and two-thirds vote of each house in the legislature.

The Town of Acton provides approximately 20 acres of town-owned athletic fields, in addition to the facilities provided by the local and regional schools, that are frequently used for non-school activities. Most areas are suited for a variety of athletic uses, with some areas capable of supporting multiple simultaneous uses. With recent budget cuts, maintenance of athletic fields has become difficult. Athletic leagues expressed concern that there were only marginally sufficient areas to use, and that there will soon be a need for additional fields. Finally, it is difficult for groups that are not part of the four leagues to obtain use of the fields during the season, so ideally a field area not assigned to a league should be developed.

There are two proposed greenbelts in Acton: Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook, which comprise the principal watersheds in town. The idea behind the greenbelt concept as it is being applied here is to evaluate all the parcels of publicly owned land adjacent to the brooks, and to deal with them as unified corridors. Management plans developed for each greenbelt will address access points, area utilization, and identification of privately owned parcels for future acquisition. The benefit of such a program is that it will provide long trails for fishing and boating access, wildlife corridors to support varied animal life, and a reservoir for wetlands ecosystems.

Unprotected Open Space Land

The state owns 199.2 acres of land in Acton, 168 acres of which could be described as "open space." There are three major categories of open space: part of the Department of Corrections Farm (122 acres), parcels taken when Route 2 was built lying outside of the right-of-way, and the Whittier land (25 acres) under the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

One parcel not associated with an actual school building, but considered to be "school land" and holding value as open space, is located on Arlington Street, north of Route 2, and is 24.92 acres (Town Atlas Place E-3, Parcel 8). This land was acquired in 1962 as a potential school site.

There are 1,254.92 acres of open space in Acton listed under the Chapter 61 (forest lands), Chapter 61A (agriculture), and Chapter 61 B (private recreational lands) tax classifications for reduced real estate taxes.. Developing these lands is fairly easy, but

the town is given a 120 day right of first refusal to purchase the land if it is to be sold or undergo a change of use.

There are three cemeteries in Acton. Woodlawn, located on Concord Road in Acton Center, is comprised of 80 acres, of which 31 are developed. Mount Hope, located on Central Street in West Acton has 94 acres, 11 of which are developed, and Forest Cemetery, located on Carlisle Road in North Acton is half an acre, and is fully developed. These three municipal cemeteries have value as open space. At the present rate of use, there will be sufficient room at the two active cemeteries for at least 100 years.

One significant parcel of open space not included in other inventories is land (other than Camp Acton) still owned by the Acton Boy Scouts located adjacent to the Spring Hill Conservation Area between Pope Road and Wheeler Lane.

Open Space and Recreation Issues, Strategies & Actions

Open Space and Recreation Planning

The Town's 1996 Open Space and Recreation Plan shares many of the Master Plan's goals, objectives and actions, and the Town is implementing many of its recommendations. In addition, the Town needs to coordinate with neighboring communities to protect environmental resources effectively and provide a full range of recreational opportunities.

Strategies for Open Space and Recreation Planning

Strategy OSR1

Continue to implement the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Strategy OSR2

Continue to participate in regional open space planning.

Strategy OSR3

In new developments, continue to maintain open space corridors and easements for trails and pedestrian walks.

Strategy OSR4

Continue to connect open space and conservation lands through additional land acquisitions or easements.

Strategy OSR5

Continue to improve connections among Town conservation and recreation lands through acquisition of more land, easements, and through trails or paths.

Strategy OSR6

Create a mechanism to finance and acquire public open space.

Strategy OSR7

Review existing Town lands for possible swaps with high priority lands to be preserved.

Strategy OSR8

Examine the costs and benefits of instituting an open space option in assessing vacant parcels, and pursue other taxation policies that foster open space preservation.

Strategy OSR9

Continue to monitor options for zoning techniques and other regulations and standards to promote open space protection.

Recommended Actions for Open Space and Recreation Planning

Action OSR-1

Protect the following properties through a variety of preservation techniques in order to preserve those properties that have been identified in the 1996 Open Space and Recreation Plan as being critical to preserving Acton's rural character.

- *The Conant property on Nagog Hill Road, abutting Nagog Hill and Grassy Pond Conservation areas.*
- *The land owned by the Palmer Family Realty Trust*
- *The Simeone or Stonefield Farm in South Acton*
- *The Kennedy land abutting the North Acton Recreation Area*
- *Several large parcels of land near the Concord and Carlisle borders, abutting Camp Acton, Nashoba Brook, and Spring Hill Conservation Areas.*

Action OSR-2

Develop a plan to educate and inform residents about open space planning and needs.

Action OSR-3

Every two years, update the prioritization of all open space in Acton, including protected and unprotected parcels. Use the results of the open space survey, the farm survey, information from the Conservation Land Stewardship Committee and the goals, objectives and priorities outlined in the Open Space and Recreation Plan as guidelines.

Action OSR-4

Obtain abutting towns' open space plans and identify potential corridors between the towns and ways in which water resources (e.g. Nagog Pond), important to another community can be better protected.

Action OSR-5

Work with the Conservation Land Stewardship Committee to identify the status of those parcels important for the provision of greenbelts and wildlife corridors within Acton and within abutting towns.

Action OSR-6

Lobby for an extension of the Lowell-Sudbury Rail Trail through Acton.

Action OSR-7

Continue meeting with the Assabet River Rail Trail communities to move construction forward.

Action OSR-8

Participate in the Bay Circuit Trail planning effort

Action OSR-9

Work with MAGIC on possible connections between different bike trails.

Action OSR-10

Pursue development of the greenbelt concept for Fort Point Brook and Nashoba Brook.

Action OSR-11

Provide information to the Conservation Trust identifying those parcels meriting protection for their value as greenbelt and wildlife corridors between Acton's' conservation lands and also between Acton lands and those of abutting towns.

Action OSR-12

Work with the Conservation Land Stewardship Committee to develop an implementation plan for the Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook greenbelts.

Action OSR-13

Apply for the Mass. Division of Conservation Services' Self-Help Program for the purchase of conservation land.

Action OSR-14

Pursue funding available for trail development, maintenance or restoration through a variety of sources.

Open Space Protection of Key Parcels

Acton contains many unique and valuable land resources ranging from prime farmland to rare species habitat. The Town's 1996 *Open Space and Recreation Plan* prioritized parcels for open space protection in order to focus efforts on key parcels of land that promote local conservation values and goals. Now the task is to implement the acquisition plan.

Strategies to Acquire Key Open Space Parcels

Strategy OSR10

Continue to consider all offers of land under Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B in accordance with the goals of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Strategy OSR11

Continue efforts to preserve farmland as a resource. Focus on prime and state farmland and land currently in farm use.

Strategy OSR12

Purchase agricultural preservation restrictions using the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program of the Department of Food and Agriculture. Establish appropriate fund.

Recommended Actions to Acquire Key Open Space Parcels

Action OSR-15

Survey all remaining farms in Acton to determine what methods might be used or available to ensure their preservation. Pay particular attention to maintaining the following farms:

- *Simeone or Stonefield Farm in South Acton (Stow Border)*

- *Idylwilde Farm in West Acton*

- *Kennedy Farm in North Acton (Westford Border)*

- *DiDuca Farm in East Acton*

- *Horse farms in the Pope Road/Strawberry Hill Road/Estabrook Road area, and those on Nagog Hill Road, in West Acton and in other sections of town.*

Recreational Opportunities

Acton has many recreational resources. Much progress has been made in making available information about these resources so that townspeople may enjoy them. A recreation director was hired recently to promote and raise local awareness of the town's existing recreational facilities and coordinate recreational programs.

The Town has improved access to water features in Acton since the 1991 Master Plan. Efforts will continue through the participation in regional organizations such as the "stream-team" of the Assabet River. By mid-summer 1999 the new North Acton Recreation Area (NARA) will include a nine-acre groundwater-fed pond with beach area, bathhouse, and picnic areas.

Strategies to Improve Recreational Opportunities

Strategy OSR13

Continue to increase public awareness of Acton's recreational opportunities.

Strategy OSR14

Continue to improve access to ponds and streams.

Strategy OSR15

Continue to explore possibilities of making more ponds and streams suitable for boating and fishing.

Strategy OSR16

Continue to develop and maintain recreation facilities on Ice House Pond.

Recommended Actions to Improve Recreational Opportunities

Action OSR-16

Distribute handouts and brochures for the major parks and public lands which show the trails, special features and access points for pedestrians, the disabled, and vehicles.

Action OSR-17

Create a new map for inclusion in the Guide to Acton's Conservation Lands, showing access points and suggested canoe routes along portions of Fort Pond Brook, Nashoba River and the Assabet River.

Action OSR-18

Apply to the Mass. Dept. of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement's Urban Rivers Grant Program to enhance public access to rivers in Acton.

Action OSR-19

Add trails or increase public access to areas that can accommodate pedestrians.

Action OSR-20

Map and upgrade public access points to the Nashoba Brook to allow fishing by creating a continuous foot access to the brook from Carlisle Road to Great Road.

Maintenance of Conservation and Recreation Lands and Facilities

The 1991 Plan observed that the number of hours devoted by Municipal Properties for conservation maintenance had increased substantially in recent years, but the need existed for more public involvement in maintaining the Town's conservation and recreation resources. The Plan also observed that as Acton's population grows, so will the need for additional parks, hiking trails, and recreational facilities and services. Much progress has occurred since 1991 and with the establishment of its new Recreational Division, the Natural Resources Department is assuming responsibility for the Town's maintenance of conservation and recreation lands.

Strategies for Improved Maintenance of Lands and Facilities

Strategy OSR17

Continue with land stewardship and volunteer efforts to substitute and supplement Town efforts (e.g., encourage users of recreation areas to remove trash).

Strategy OSR18

Continue to plant more shade trees at public recreation facilities.



Strategy OSR19
Continue to improve access and maintenance of conservation and recreation lands including parking areas and demarcation of trails and boundaries, both existing and newly acquired.

Strategy OSR20

Develop an under-21 club or youth center away from school complex.

Strategy OSR21

Continue to improve and maintain accessibility for persons with disabilities to public buildings and facilities, recreational areas, conservation lands, playgrounds, sidewalks, etc.

Strategy OSR22

Continue to balance sports league activity on playing fields with the need for non-organized recreation.

Recommended Actions for Improved Maintenance of Lands and Facilities

Action OSR-21

Develop a forestry management plan, in conjunction with the town's tree warden, for all forested conservation lands.

Action OSR-22

Complete the Arboretum Master Plan.

Action OSR-23

Apply to the Urban Forestry Program for a Mass ReLeaf Grant through DEM to obtain funding for tree purchasing and planting.

Action OSR-24

Develop a plan for conservation land maintenance of trails, campsites at Camp Acton, access to waterways and signage. Ensure that handicapped accessibility improvements (identified in the Open Space and Recreation Plan inventory) are addressed. Also ensure trails are accessible to the elderly and adequate benches are provided.

North Acton Recreation Area

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Acton traditionally provides high quality services, facilities, and administration consistent with the fiscal capacity of the community. The 1991 Master Plan identified several major capital improvement needs. The Town has made progress on this list. Examples include the Senior Citizen Center, Acton Memorial Library, and North Acton Recreation Area. The community has demonstrated its commitment to protecting natural resources by approving the replacement of underground storage tanks at Town facilities and the initiation of the South Acton/Kelley's Corner Sewer System. Progress has been made in upgrading the Town administration's Management Information System to integrate fully the Town's decision support systems.

Other important capital improvement needs to be addressed in coming years include improvements and expansion to schools buildings, expanding the sewer system, and working with the Water District to continue providing good quality and quantity of water. The community also needs to begin considering whether and how to augment the Fire Department's facilities and the Senior Citizen Center.

Services and Facilities Issues, Strategies & Actions

New or Expanded Facilities Needed by the Town

Acton's population increase drives the need for facilities. In cases the need is exacerbated by changing codes and standards, or the personnel and equipment needed to serve the growing community have outgrown available space.

Strategies for Providing New or Expanded Facilities

Strategy SF1

Move ahead with plans for a new public safety facility or facilities.

Strategy SF2

Examine Acton's needs for municipal land other than for conservation.

Strategy SF3

Plan for expansion of municipal facilities.

Strategy SF4

Continue to strive for excellence in educating Acton's youth.

Strategy SF5

Select and implement an option for upgrading and expanding school facilities.

Strategy SF6

Continue to maintain the quality and diversity of educational and cultural resources for all ages, including the Community Education Programs, Library Service and Acton's participation in the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School District.

Strategy SF7

Continue to encourage public and private cooperation to facilitate the use of Acton's multiple resources for educational and cultural purposes, including conservation lands, historic resources, private businesses and industries, and social services; and facilitate internship programs for Acton's youth.



Recommended Actions for Providing New or Expanded Facilities

Action SF-1

Continue working to meet the remaining capital improvement needs identified in the 1991 Master Plan.

Action SF-2

Plan and implement new construction, and expansions and renovations of the elementary school, junior and senior high schools. Continue community deliberations to reach agreement on implementing improvements to schools.

Water and Sewer Capital Improvements

The Town has begun the complex and expensive task of sewerage to support a broad range of Master Plan goals, including the preservation of natural resources and the servicing of desired residential and business development. These efforts have begun with a focus on South Acton Village, Kelley's Corner and the main school

campus. The Town will need to continue planning for sewer service to other key areas.

Water withdrawal limitations were placed on all public water suppliers as part of the Water Management Act. The Water District is currently permitted to withdraw a total of 700.8 Million Gallons per Year [MGY]. The District expects that the FY98 water production will come very close to that amount. It is unclear what will happen when Acton's water use exceeds the annual permitted withdrawal.

Action SF-3

Plan and implement sewer service for West Acton Village and East Acton Village.

Action SF-4

Continue assisting the Water District in promoting water-conserving practices throughout Acton, with special attention to low water using landscape techniques.

Action SF-5

Incorporate in the site plan review process standards and criteria relating to the use of low water landscape techniques .

Action SF-6

Continue assisting the Water District in achieving needed raising of the cap on water withdrawal.

Action SF-7

Continue assisting the Water District in its efforts to develop new sources of water for the community.

Services & Facilities for Elderly and Lower-Income Residents

Rising taxes and the need for social services are creating hardships for elderly and other vulnerable persons. At present the Directors of the Housing Authority and the Council on Aging are extending well beyond their spheres to cushion the impact of diminished federal and state services. The Police force is working with people in crisis intervention, because there is no social service department to handle this. Acton's changing demographics may merit consideration of a Town Social Service Department. Townspeople feel that it is important for the elderly and persons with disabilities to remain independent in their homes as much as possible.

Strategies to Accommodate the Elderly and Lower-Income Residents

Strategy SF8

Establish ways to enable lower-income homeowners, the elderly, and other residents with special needs to remain in Acton, preferably in their homes.

Strategy SF9

Continue to have affordable non-profit nursing and home care service available in Acton.

Strategy SF10

Encourage elder care facilities

Strategy SF11

Continue to remove barriers for the handicapped through zoning and other available methods.

Recommended Actions to Accommodate the Elderly

Action SF-8

Schedule and carry out an examination of the needs for a second facility to serve seniors, and implement the resulting recommendations.

Communication

Open and timely communication between municipal bodies is essential to effective local government. In addition, municipal officials should play a key role in informing residents about key local issues.

Strategy SF12

Continue a high level of inter-departmental and inter-board communication and coordination.

Strategy SF13

Continue to build and update technology and equipment for the Town's MIS and GIS systems within the Town's government, with accompanying staff capacity and staff training.

Paying For Services and Amenities Desired By Residents

Residents are concerned about the increasing costs of maintaining the quality of services they desire. Deliberations during the 1998 Update showed the need to seek out and evaluate potential alternatives for funding services and facilities. Townspeople are open to discussing alternative ways of gaining revenue, but they want clarity regarding potential costs

and benefits, and assurance that new strategies are feasible.

Strategy SF14

Research and suggest new strategies to pay for Town services and facilities, evaluating their feasibility, costs, and benefits.

Strategy SF15

Continue to monitor the applicability of impact fees for residential, commercial and industrial development to fund capital improvements needed to service new development (e.g., sewers, water, streets, police and fire protection).

Strategy SF16

Consider how adjusting and/or slowing the pattern of residential development might help the Town's fiscal picture.

Master Plan Consistency

The Town has adopted zoning amendments that require Master Plan consistency when issuing special permits and variances.

Residents expressed support for continuation of this policy and would like to see continued use of the Master plan, as updated, as a guide for Town government decision making.

Strategy SF17

Continue to require Master Plan consistency in zoning decisions, and strive for Master Plan consistency in all Town government actions.

TRAFFIC AND CIRCULATION

The purpose of this section of the Update is to identify the deficiencies and needs of the current transportation facilities and develop strategies to facilitate the orderly growth and development that is described within the goals and objectives of the Master Plan.

This section of the Update reviews Acton's existing roadway and traffic characteristics, traffic data, and traffic operations. The focus is managing the road system and the impacts from increasing development; maintaining and building sidewalks, walking paths and bicycle routes; and balancing the need to move traffic safely through town while preserving town character.

Transportation and Circulation Issues, Strategies & Actions Highway Capacity and Safety

Safety and capacity are concerns on the major roadways where daily volumes range from 10,000-20,000 cars per day. During peak hours, traffic spills into residential

areas introducing hazardous conditions for pedestrians. The need exists to increase the capacity of Acton's major arterial routes to draw through traffic away from roads serving residential neighborhoods.

Several of the interchanges with Route 2 need improvement. With design and geometric limitations, problems at these interchanges are a by-product of traffic growth on Route 2, and the resulting pressure on lesser roadways to accommodate the growth. In addition, Route 2 experiences major congestion during peak hours, causing additional traffic to spill into Acton's smaller roads.

Strategies to Address Highway Capacity and Safety

Strategy TC1

Smooth traffic flow on Acton's major arterial highways by making improvements to remove bottlenecks at key intersections (e.g., turning lanes, signal timing, etc.), and by applying appropriate travel demand strategies.



Strategy TC2

Reduce curb cuts.

Strategy TC3

Encourage separate service roads on Route 2.

Strategy TC4

Pursue Route 2 improvements to encourage regional commuter traffic to stay on Route 2 and discourage cut-through traffic.

Strategy TC5

Implement a traffic calming program to reduce speeds on local roadways and the use of local roadways by through vehicles.

Recommended Actions to Address Highway Capacity and Safety

Action TC-1

Implement safety studies to identify appropriate improvements at the Route 2/Massachusetts Avenue intersection.

Action TC-2

Implement a program in coordination with the local or state police department to track accident trends in different areas of town.

Action TC-3

Implement studies of accidents at highest accident locations on a regular basis to develop design improvements at these locations.

Action TC-4

Develop a town wide traffic calming program to discourage cut-through traffic and enhance the residential environment. Establish guidelines for the specific villages, and explore the possibility of incorporating into the village zoning bylaws.

Action TC-5

Conduct a comprehensive study of Route 27 from Great Road to High Street.

Action TC-6

Conduct a comprehensive study of Route 2A from the Concord Town Line to the Littleton Town Line.

Action TC-7

Monitor traffic operations and accident frequency at completed roadway improvement locations.

Regional Transportation

The town can accomplish much by coordinating with surrounding towns. Issues such as regional shuttles for park and ride facilities, or regional impact studies of proposed developments could address several transportation concerns raised in the Master Plan process.

Action TC-8

Either through MAGIC or the development of a regional transportation board comprised of officials from surrounding towns, work in coordination with surrounding towns to address immediate regional transportation issues..

Financing Highway Improvements

New development must be accommodated with improved highway infrastructure. Several sources are potentially available to finance these improvements such as federal and state grants and impact fees, and off-site improvement requirements.

Strategy TC6

Seek additional state and federal aid for highway construction and general transportation improvement projects.

Strategy TC7

Monitor the legal status of impact fees or required off-site improvements where roadway improvements are necessitated by new development, and implement such measures as feasible.

Strategy TC8

Evaluate the applicability of betterment districts to facilitate improvements in transportation and pedestrian infrastructure.

Strategy TC9

Require (1) dedication of land for road, sidewalks, and biking improvements, and (2) adequate tie-in to the existing road network as condition of land development.

Public Transportation, Pedestrian Ways, Connectivity and Circulation

By providing transportation choices to serve various age groups and income levels in the population, Acton can reduce the number of automobile trips generated daily and meet the needs of its citizens. Coordinating a regional public transportation system can reduce peak traffic levels by addressing traffic patterns generated from adjacent communities. Constructing linkages such as bicycle paths and walking trails, along with allocating space on existing streets for bicyclists, between neighborhoods and shopping areas in village centers will also decrease the need for automobiles.

Strategies to Expand Transportation & Circulation Choices

Strategy TC10

Encourage trip reduction measures, i.e. van/car pooling, private transportation services; park and ride facilities; and use demand management (i.e. flexible work hours).

Strategy TC11

Investigate the potential for a commuter shuttle to the South Acton commuter rail station with satellite parking lots.

Strategy TC12

Study the feasibility of local and/or regional transit service.

Strategy TC13

Use zoning incentives for participation in local and regional transit systems.

Strategy TC14

Lobby for increased train service to Boston and a regional rail center west of Acton.

Strategy TC15

Explore making elderly and handicapped transportation available to low income residents.

Strategy TC16

Secure cross-town access over Route 2.

Strategy TC17

Build sidewalks, walk ways and bike ways that provide connections between neighborhoods and key activity centers. Require the construction of sidewalks and walk ways and bike ways for new development where possible and appropriate.

Strategy TC18

Aggressively advocate coordination of improvement projects with MHD.

Recommended Actions to Expand Transportation & Circulation Choices

Action TC-9

Build sidewalks leading to South Acton Village and commuter rail station.

Action TC-10

Improve facilities for bicyclists.

Action TC-11

Provide funding and support for Assabet River Rail-Trail.

Action TC-12

Reduce curb cuts on Great Road.

Action TC-13

Construct sidewalks on Great Road and Wetherbee Street.

Action TC-14

Construct sidewalks on West Acton Village-area streets.

Action TC-15

Create pedestrian and bicycle connections between activity centers.

Action TC-16

Slow Massachusetts Avenue traffic by installing pedestrian amenities.

Action TC-17

Develop sidewalks and bikeways to connect NARA with surrounding neighborhoods.

Action TC-18

Continue to develop a program to address missing pedestrian and bicycle linkages and limited facilities within activity centers and neighborhoods.

Action TC-19

Comprehensive study of additional potential pedestrian and bicycle linkages.

Action TC-20

Pursue a Rail-with-Trail along Fitchburg line right-of-way.

Action TC-21

Study bicycle accommodation along Route 27.

Action TC-22

Study bicycle path in North Acton.

Action TC-23

Pursue creation of bicycle lanes along Route 111.

Action TC-24

Enhance bicycle visibility through appropriate signage and pavement markings.

Action TC-25

Amend Zoning By-Law to require provision of bicycle racks in proportion to off-street parking spaces as close to the store as possible. Consider how to incorporate the stroller storage areas into these facilities.

Action TC-26

Provide public bicycle parking facilities in village areas, at all public buildings, and at all recreation areas.

Parking

Inadequate commuter parking facilities in towns west of Acton will continue to cause high demand for the parking lot at the South Acton commuter rail station. Expansion of surface parking at the station is constrained by wetlands and topographical characteristics as well as roadway access capacity limitations. Parking capacity at the station has been maximized, excluding the construction of a parking deck or garage. This is an important regional facility and the needs of users must be met. Measures like the proposed agreement with the Clock Tower Place in Maynard to provide shuttle service from a major employment center to and from the commuter rail station would increase use without adding demand for parking.

The Town has adopted zoning amendments providing special design standards for parking in the villages (North Acton, East Acton, South Acton and West Acton) and in Kelley's Corner. The regulations promote the sharing of off-street parking areas and require new parking lots to be sited behind the principal structure. In addition, for the SAV, WAV and KC districts, the new regulations call for enhanced landscaping, off-street vehicular connections among and between parking lots, and limits on the number and spacing of access driveways.

Strategies to Alleviate Parking Problems

Strategy TC19

Provide sufficient parking capacity for commuter rail users through the addition of off-site parking and shuttle service to the commuter rail from major employment centers and other areas.

Strategy TC20

Discourage non-resident parking at South Acton commuter station for commuters originating from areas west of Acton and encourage van service from other towns, such as Maynard and Stow.

Strategy TC21

Continue to lobby the MBTA for increased commuter rail service west of Acton.

Strategy TC22

Continue to explore options for a West Acton commuter station.

Strategy TC23

Lobby for the expansion of commuter lots in other towns west of Acton.

Strategy TC24

Create additional public and/or private off-street parking in village centers in keeping with the character of the villages.

Strategy TC25

Continue to encourage driveway connections between off-street parking lots for improved vehicular circulation off the public ways.

Strategy TC26

Amend zoning regulations to promote the use of shared off-street parking and to limit the size and number of curb cuts per lot. Include a requirement in the zoning bylaw for bicycle parking, encouraging bike parking to be placed as close to the store entrance as possible.

Private Involvement in Roadway Projects

In view of the difficulty in funding improvement projects, public/private partnerships are important to securing funds for the implementation of infrastructure improvements.

Strategy TC27

Pursue potential public/private funding sources and other public/private partnerships that further transportation goals as set forth in the master plan.

